

Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

harud

(the autumn)

brij nath pandit betab

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we ran into each other at a roadside in new delhi about two decades after the mass-departure of the pandits from the valley . " what power gave our land the evil eye, who knows? " said he with a rueful disquiet. i acquiesced, despite my scepticism, for i knew he was being metaphorical. that was brij nath betab, my former student . and now i am looking , cursorily though , at the manuscript of his english poems entitled" harud, the autumn ." what better title to have for a volume of poems dealing with what was once the "paradise on earth" now ravaged by impersonal forces of history ? the autumn that has overtaken kashmir is different from that eulogised by keats which is almost as salubrious as spring , for like spring it has its music too. as a young boy i had the good fortune of watching dina nath nadim's opera "bombur tae yemberzal," at nedou's hotel, srinagar. the opera is an allegorical representation of the vicissitudes which kashmir went through in the early 1950s . with the onset of harud assisted by its accomplice waw (the storm) the idyllic land is rendered desolate. the narcissus and the bumblebee are torn apart for a time but they are finally united. the symbol of harud as a great ravager of the lush green land is appropriately used by nadim . betab's kashmir, or for that matter anybody else's kashmir is vandalised by the forces of autumn, and sadly, it is in no mood even now to let go of the valley : harud has stayed too long life may , may not stay (from the eponymous poem, "harud"). the poet, though disoriented by the thought of his uprootedness, can still take comfort from remembering the two most iconic figures of his homeland - Abhinava Gupta and Lal ded. his remembrance of them will ever inspire him in his creative endeavours and thereby perpetuate his spiritual bond with the paradise lost. betab feels the excruciating pain of having to live far away from his native land. however, he avoids magnifying his anguish . through use of symbols, metaphors, paradoxes and other tropes of his poetic craft, he succeeds in subduing his sense of loss to artistic terms and doesn't welter in mawkishness. once in a while, he deflects his mind off the leitmotif of his poems - the loss of his homeland - and dwells on the mundaneness of things. in "forgive me Lord", he tells his creator that he cannot spare his time to worship him as his whole time is taken up by petty chores he is supposed to perform in his various capacities : forgive me lord for i need to pleasefirst and foremost my masters bosses in office else my promotion upward my postings abroad and those lucrative seats in office shall not be even granted me betab's poems are charged with the anguish felt by an exile in an environment he can't adjust to. but there is no touch of acrimony or resentment to his articulation . his expression is steady, facile and urbane.

Dedicated by
Mr. B.N. Belal

harud
(the autumn)

brij nath pandit (betab)

a collection of
thoughts, truths and mysteries
of life

harud (the autumn)

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disclaimer

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the cultural academy shall not be responsible in any way for any sort of controversy or omission in the contents of the book.

in loving memory of my respected parents



janki nath & janak rani

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i am Shiva

i
fought maya
lighted the lamp of knowledge
moved inwards
meditated
upon the fire of consciousness
offered my senses
anointed existence
with these ashes
and became
Shiva

the news

honeymoon destination

kashmir is paradise

i am a tourist...

my birthplace

kashmir is hell

i am the native.

thorns in a bush
can produce no honey
to a human being
shower the cruel taunt
infidel
with no grace shall he speak love
i speak though
a hundred times more
and softly too
i am the tradition
epithet of Shiva
Neelkantha

fascination

fascinated by
the neighbour's stunt
he abandoned
his white car
insisted
got the bike
black in colour
next day
the bike skidded
he broke his arms
bruises all around
even the bandage hurts now
it may take a while
to recover fully
but alas
he has lost the bike
to the slippery road

invention

walk

straight into my heart

o creator of aryabhatiya !

receive

coveted accolades

for inventing zero

i would never have known my value

being a commodity

a saleable one

but for your invention

blank page

you are off the beam
if you thought...
you erased
what my ancestors wrote...
beautiful and fragrant
fascinating, prideful....
please remember
Abhinav and Lall...
are eternal, immortal
my pages shall never be
blank....

matchbox

i am not a terrorist
but i have in my house
the most lethal weapon
a matchbox

each member of the family is scared of its unwanted use
in my house
the palatial house
parents safeguard
their bedroom

my elder brother protects his own
my wife takes care of the beautiful one
meant for two of us
together we all
protect and safeguard
the common room
and the drawing room
the children take care of
their study room
we have a guest room too
a kitchen also
we are emotionally attached to the house
it is our precious asset
in this all in one house
each corner gives us

some hope Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

but we are

afraid of the matchbox

matches used to light

the prayer lamp's wick

can go up in flames

suddenly, unexpected

like kashmir

and devastate

our lives yet again

we live in a canvas tent

we are refugees

in our own land

the year is 1990

harud
(the autumn)

this heap of mud
is my Harmukh
broken pieces of my heart
my offerings
wild shrubs grown here
are my sins
here i circumambulate each night
in dreadful dreams
and pray
for return
respectful...
i lived here
once
with my Shiva
that spring is gone
harud has stayed too long
life
may or may not stay

metamorphosis

listening to
the words
i create
you figure meanings
conversing
you shape me out
with your perceptions
words, mine, communicate
you realize
interpret and assign meanings
with your grasp
the meaning that creates an image
i try to fit in
successfully
you conquer
i lose my being
wonder i now
influence of the word
ponder for meaning
Lord, the creator
wonders too
for the word
that he created me

resurrection

closeted with
dueling a civilization
they thought, i was dead
in the darkness of its untold upheavals
buried though under geographical form
i resurrected
the alter of history guarding, still
dueling once again i am, though
with my own suspense
yet a quota of survivals

that day

it will happen
he will arrive
bring us
all we need
a little cheer in life
a joyful day
day that shall bestow on us a feel
that we live...
it will happen
he shall arrive
arrive and tell
all that we need to hear
that we exist
exist to celebrate
life
till that day
existence shall remain only in name
just a noun
till that dawn

celebration

at long last
i celebrate
silence, golden
for reasons good
after all, did i not
for years long
keep shouting
and no one understood
what i really meant
as then i listened
to silence absolute
each and every one listened
finally

bliss

who knows who
may not turn against you
nor when someone is to tip you over
oh, never to know
but the day you are yourself forced to
what comes about
is the day of triumph
the triumph that calls for
a celebration

death

the profuse bleed
from a mortal hurt
that rout causes
is to lead to what?
triumph,
in silence?
or what
celebration of the end
of being self

existence

we speak a hundred lies
to establish but
one truth
i wonder though
if our existence too is a truth
that we are at a loss
to establish

the rebellion

security? ha,ha
me you cannot safeguard
the rebel in me will see to it
it kills me outrightly
indeed, a hundred counts a day
security?
you can't save me
i drip out, die
(maybe kill myself)
hundred times a day
humiliated, disgusted, disillusioned
as against them
against the system
rebel i cannot
my voice feeble
they, majesty of power
forceful
they, the state
i
but a meek
subject
born to be overruled
an entity
ah, i am a commoner

an 'aam admi'
destined to be ruined
they me tolerate
my birth to them gives an issue
my existence them a vote
my death, them life
i exist
to franchise
their existence
i live to clap
on their win
this their wish
i can't wish away
i am helpless
can i rise?
stand up?
can i rebel?
can i exist?
and live a life...
there is a dream
in my fragile eyes

black eye

besieged
under the crackdown of desire
the down town of my heart is rattled
the informers
eyes, my own
caged inside the den of reputation
put me to
identification parade
spotted not
i shall retain my 'independence' here
there is no chance to escape
the pellets of rejection
shall make me blind
blind to the world of love
live, i shall have to, but
with a sense of hurt, of failure

wetland

my heart
may not beat
fast enough
or may not stop
beating
yet, when the news flashes
'the Dal shall dry
and perish soon'
my eyes
certainly, offer drops...
drops of tears
i keep memories
dripping

pardon me Lord

pardon me Lord
unable i am to worship you
despite the knowledge
that you are the Creator
forgive me Lord
for i am busy 24x7
adulating
those who sustain me
in this world of yours
pardon me
i have parents
cannot transgress against
what you told me
my heaven lies right at their feet
they gave me birth
they brought me up, taught me
what life was all about
forgive me Lord
for i need to please
first and foremost
my masters
bosses in office
else my promotion upward
my postings abroad

and those lucrative seats in office
shall not be granted to me
pardon me Lord
for i have to obediently pay my respects to
that one politician in my locality
who decides my fate
in all the affairs of my existence on earth
his sweet will
sustains me, my reputation
holds me on to my standing
indeed, any of my karma cannot bear fruit
without his blessings
just cannot afford to needle him
forgive me Lord
for i cannot find a second to worship you,
my day devoted entirely to my relations
i have to submit to their whims
and satisfy their ego
for they should decide
my standing in the society of men
i have perforce to satisfy their children as well
for they are the ones
who make or mar my reputation
forgive, forgive
for not visiting
your place of worship
cannot bow there without offerings
my offerings cannot be gold
i possess little
and i need it
my wife wants to wear all

during the marriages of our relations
and tell the gatherings
'my husband gifted these to me
especially for this marriage
i also have to preserve a little
for daughter's marriage
for dowry
else she will remain unmarried
pardon me Lord
i cannot offer you money
the currency notes could be fake
i am afraid
the little amount that i save
by doing overtime in office
is meant to buy a bike
for my son
to enable him to declare
attainment of his youth
in the college
forgive me Lord
for i cannot offer you milk
it could be adulterated
i cannot offer you
plain water even
the pride of India
Ganga and the Yamuna are contaminated, both
carrying dirt, filth
and toxic industrial waste
forgive me Lord
i cannot shower lotus petals on you
flying overhead in a helicopter

the dal lake, that produces the lotus
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is a dump of garbage

pardon me Lord

i known of no place

where i can put my bald head on your bare-feet

i know, though, there are Rama's wooden sandals

there is a place where Krishna

gave the Geeta sermons

there are Vishnu's footprints

Buddha's seven-step monument

there are holy springs and caves

temples and shrines

sacred and sanctified places

but, pardon me Lord

my third eye has not opened

to me, you are invisible only to be realized

at home, peeping inwards

and i can do that

only after i fulfill all the social obligations

forgive me Lord

i do not worship you,

have to worship those

who matter in this world

those who fulfil my want

for i am a social animal

cannot live alone

you made me unlike You

unlike Yourself

cannot afford to live alone

all alone

blissful, contented.

hundred and ten

what fear makes you kill children?
that can't fight bullets, at all
with stones in hands, tiny and small
with commandos guarding you around
what fear makes you order
the little one's slaying and pounding
like an enemy on the border
i thought you had loved
the tenderness of parenthood
i thought you will surely do
these innocent children something good
what kind of history are you making
whose orders are you taking?
and going down so low
these children know no politics
they know no hatred
the seeds, that you sow
i thought you will kill the sin
what fear makes you kill the sinner
Lord sent these children to your custody
not to be pounded on roads
what fear makes you kill these children?
like a greedy butcher's sheep
a pair a day, oh zulchu

i wonder how you sleep

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drenched in innocent blood, neck deep

what greed makes you stick to the chair

don't your own children express the fear?

these are humans not sheep flocks

with their bloodbath can you thrive

mark darwish's* words

death does not pain the dead

pains it those who are alive

* mahmoud darwish

lost prayers

towards their school
the children
run and race
school bags
fastened to their back
with prayers full
and joy of learning fresh on their face
in the morning hour
leave to discover
a world of joy...
for the day
i become the window
and wait
closing the main gate
the flying crow returning from the skies
occupies a rotten bough
of that old walnut tree
befriending me
stray dogs bark
to ward off the evil
and ensure a safety mark
puppies
learn to crawl

as sun beams

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offer warmth to all

women from the locality

assemble with fun and frolic

tales they share

tying their dark hair

watching the splendour

on its banks

the rivulet, in the heart of hearts

offers its thanks

water blushes

fast it rushes

new harvest

put to dry

on an old grass mat

a sparrow

carries away some grain

to ward off the hunger

goes red in the face

losing some of its grace

the crow on the bough

croons the afternoon lullaby

as evening descends

i look on the track

children are back home

alas

the bags are empty

the prayers are lost

i stumble

the children fumble

bags smell of explosives
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who imagined ever
a child, while returning home
will be lost forever
the flying sparrow broke her claw
the crop on the mat is soaked
the crow on the bough is mum
the life that remains
shall ever remain numb

migration

my own shadow, eh
how it overshadows my own size
but then, do I have a size ?
i ask
does a migrant
a stone, rolling down Harmukh
have a size
have a substantive shape
has it any weight
yes i ask

lady of the lake

cheeks red
a black mole on her right cheek
like a dewdrop
on a lotus bed
rowing a boat in the back waters of the lake
she collected lotus stems
throwing away the lotuses
listening to no arguments
she kept rowing
through weedy impediments
happy and satisfied as one could be
“stems can fetch a meal”
so thought she
gazing at her, the smiling sun
whispered to the cool breeze
she has won
with so much ease
it is her need, not ignorance
to an empty stomach
what use has fragrance ?

padshah

(king of kings)

i am no poet
curfew imposed in the city
not my refrain
my catchphrase is the shop
in a by lane
in the city
that is forced to shut
during city clampdowns
shops can sell no baby food
it is civil curfew
that even hunger cannot defy
i am no poet
nor hunger my theme
poem is the empty pocket of a labourer
idle for days
remembering
how he would sing gulrez
humming ' ya shah padshah'
pulling a cart through the day
to fetch a tin of milk
for the survival of his tiny tot
i am no poet
nor a toiler's helplessness

my poem
poem is the dead silence
civil curfew in the city, where
feeble cries of infants
rebound unheard
in the dead of night
i am no poet
here, in my dark city
the sobbing of a baby too is no poem
for me
the poem is the desperation of a frail mother
whose milk glands have dried
yet she makes the child suck
her parched nipples
the ravenous child cries
mother shuts his mouth, tight
child 'close thy eyes, sleep
else the informer turns'
fearful of back-biters
informers
killers
even neighbours
with mouth shut, the child has slept
for ever
the father has lost a child in the house
i have lost the poet in me

ladishah

seeing him after a while
as ladishah, the folk bard
entered my paddy yard
i ran towards him, said
welcome ...
please, today, sing a song
for me
i shall fill to the edge
your saccule with paddy
bestow on you some riches fit
but do sing a song
some pop beat or an old hit
be at ease
we haven't laughed for a while
sing something for us today
make us smile please
a spoof on floods will do
a satire on salt shall be good
sing a parody on drought
make us laugh
that is the soul's certified food
piercing through his ears
my words brought him to tears
my pesky voice as he heard
Lord knows what he feared
he put his hand on my shoulders
yelled with pain

sing again never again
for there is no dearth
satire certainly not
there is no scarcity on earth.....
i cannot oblige,satisfy
regret
singing satire now i hate
for, look, if you may
on every road flood is found
all around blood is found
drought too there is none
even the innocent hands hold the gun
and salt?
in abundance is it available
on every wound we have its label
so there is no dearth
certainly not on our earth
yelling and gazing at me
ladishah put his other hand on my shoulders
don't give me a bag full of paddy
i need no riches either
fill my heart, if you can
with some peace, oh you man
fill my vision, if you can
with some bright future hope
you can afford whichever
but again ask me never to sing
i cannot
with so many dangers i am fraught
i could only sing for life
death does not listen to songs
ladishah is dead, say they
and i know
i killed him

the old man and lidder

Pahalgam, abode of honeymooner's
is deserted by one and all
even before winter fall
dak bungalow, the place to play
is a heap of ashes today
ponies are grazing in jungles deep
the taxi drivers are fast asleep
hotel rooms big and small
have lost their revenues all
once busy, potters weep
hired they are no more
suddenly from somewhere
a kalashnikov bullet is fired
then there is a crossfire
right and left nothing is found
an old man preparing to offer prayer
unmindful of the happenings around
is washing his hands at the lidder bed
a stray bullet pierces through the silence of dread
the lidder washes the old man's head
with its water cold and red
just a breath away everything is normal
except for the old man.

thoroughfare

the flame
suddenly flared up
the light
brightened the room
the friends alerted
and i felt scared
the flame would burn us
and reduce this house to ashes...
i jumped to stop the wind
from rage
the wind had force
and i was meek
thus was i thrown out
of the window...
in the melee
i broke my limbs
lying bandaged in a make-shift sickbay
am eager to return
and restore the setting
of my room...
alas, am told that
the wind had thrown out
along with me

the windows of the room

and broken the door

the room today

is not worth a return

the wind

has made it all

before that winter fall

just suddenly

a shudder of noise
in the dead of night
woke me up
within moments, suddenly
i found myself on the roads
with all my bag and baggage
suddenly hell broke all around
with roads blocked
and everything haywire
now death was looming large
the friends had turned foes, suddenly
just suddenly
where to go
what to do
whom to approach
in the dead of night
the entire city was dead
just suddenly
there was no time to ponder
there was no time to wait
it was a clarion call, loud and clear
loudspeakers
fitted on mosque tops
ordered march
'join, leave or perish'

i had become an alien
in the land where i was born
just suddenly
i ran and ran
am still running
from city to city
from a minister's door
to a clerk's desk
to put my name
in the list of migrants
to be able to draw relief
i was a donor
now i am a beggar
just suddenly
spending nights
in the open in blistering heat
i have lost my hope
my relations
my home and hearth
and yes, what have i done
i am unable to comprehend
who would know
not even a trained gunman
who thought i was his enemy
who killed my namesake
who cut to pieces that lady
on a band saw
for she had a different faith
who killed that innocent young one
calling him 'informer'
why did he threaten me?
though i spoke the same language

that i had taught his generations
Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu
we shared the same culture

a common ethos

we had the same ancestors

then what had changed

just suddenly

it is three decades

life has moved on

but i find my existence stuck

in the courtyard of my palatial house

under the walnut tree

that exists no more

that disappeared in the dark

just suddenly

who burnt my house

who stole my left-over belongings

who occupied my land illegally

who changed the course of the stream

that made my fields green

these questions bother my neighbours as well

just suddenly

what have i lost

and what has 'he' gained

me and my neighbour ponder together

what have we lost or what have we gained

just together, we wonder

why was his son killed

where has his brother disappeared

who raped that girl

could one get drowned in a stream

with little water

did the blaze of Charar-e-Sharief get him freedom

if i was a kafir

what was he?

these thoughts cause me unrest

and i get up from sleep

in the dead of night

and start thinking

just suddenly

that life in Kashmir has been going on

ever since that night

when gaw kadal had become karbala

when wandhama had become jalianwala bagh

when peace in chittisinghpura was destroyed forever

like bamyan Buddha's statues

and despite all this

life has progressed well

men have gone

and men have come

life has moved on

land has disappeared

landscape altered

skyscrapers challenge the skies

lal chowk glitters

no one counts the dead

and yes

i live with pain

that certainly is not your gain

you live with mistrust

and i live with fear

and this may not change

just suddenly.

destruction

not in words alone
had i amply warned the dew
listen oh silver queen
pay some heed
do not befriend the morning rays
just in case, you mean to shine
ill though, dew had its zeal
and now it calls for
'some magical heal'

headache

fragrance
splintered
entering my premises
opens, yet again
unhealed wounds
memories draw pain
the dream ends
i get up
with a heavy head

aroma

lily in my backyard
discarded my request for
a fragrant leaf
my room was putrid
season was gone
the lily perished
i turned to skies
prayed
for some clouds
to water the dry land
my prayers not answered
then came to my mind
snow-capped mountains
i shouted to them in anguish
voice rebounded
hit me back
no snow melted
in utter despair
i called the shady chinar
its leaves were on fire
i lost all hope
but suddenly then
i saw the wind

heading, slowly towards my room
Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu
a strange feeling
assurance of sorts
the wind brought some strange aroma
the room is shattered still
but the fragrance has
painted the walls
a whitewash of sorts

inspiration

with motifs of Chinar
embroidered on her attire
she emerged gradually, from afar
like fragrance of daffodils
and whispered
do not dream
for dreams never come true
to poor like you
ah, that was the cue
so i resolved to dream
she had met me
in a dream
but like fragrance
she evaporated...

(Inspired by a poem by w.b.yeats)

market men

it is like stock market
yeah, Kashmir politics
fluctuating for reasons unknown
or a cue from the fed
opens green
closes red
elections held
like initial public offerings
valued for high gain
measured not for public pain
voters, no less than retail investors
always in loss
parties behave like FIIs
as they too pull out
after a profit bout
politicians never toe a line
though market men pay taxes and fine
for them there is no march
as for no one they carry the torch

the dark room

very first gleam of the morning sun
waking me on my off- day
and i turn the sides
averting eyes from the burgeoning rays
rising late
from a night's nap
is great fun
the morning nap bringing on dreams
dreams that surely fill some tell-tale gap
day-dreaming is a branch of life cycle
without it, to what may life amount?
though dreams never come true
sometimes though they bring strife
today i have my share of such good
enjoying life in my house
with parents, children and wife
house that has wooden windows
cemented walls and a thatched roof
the four-storey house
twenty-four windows
seven doors
twelve rooms and a big hall
some rooms big and some small

small like a leap year february
big like august and january
there is a brook in the courtyard
and a rivulet in the back
the one says welcome to the sun
the other makes the moon run
there are some bushes with honey bees
some cherry plants and walnut trees
here the birds chirp and nestle
the neighbourhood is a place of hustle and bustle
my neighbours are a delight
with me, on any issue
they never fight
i have my share
they their right
there is a cow and a calf
they own my courtyard half
the paddy in the fields is ready
the pear tree is laden with crop
all life is smooth and steady
there is one, though
that goes the whole hog
it is none other than
my dog
i always find him bark aloud
whenever he has the slightest doubt
it is usual that in my dream
i hear an odd scream
and suddenly perceive the sound of some battle
i get up and notice on the wall

the photographs of my burnt house rattle
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i close windows to the wind
save the photos from a free fall
i have avoided yet another doom
running through the same alley
but yes, it is now dark
inside the rented room
outside the valley

waw
(the storm)

a signboard was fixed
in the garden
in each and every flower bed
warning visibly
'do not pluck flowers here'
one day
the fragrance, however attracted
an illiterate wind

waw

wandhama

milk
mixed with
ruddy shower
in the lap of twenty- three
toddlers listening to
lullaby of bullets
slept for ever
and
wandhama was born

night of wandhama

those mortified skies
enclosed within dark clouds
unable to snoop into cries
the willow trees dried
the paddy fields
scorched
when at the dead of night
the earth cried
and with every shudder kept counting
the dead
one
two
three...
twenty -three
and lost the count of the dead
the last bullet
pierced through the smiling silence
of the suckling
a few breaths
and then the hallucination, a horror
milk sieved out of veins
and tiny drops
wrote the history of terror

Chittisinghpura

mother could not help
father could not rescue
aunt unable to move
uncle too immovable
the neighbours, just not there
he saw all the thirty- six
kissing the motherland
one by one
when to his rescue
none could come
except a sharp bullet
the hard-hearted
that did not wait
and pierced
through his
pelvis
the toddler
all by himself
embraced valour
crawled a bit
and then fell
to become a martyr
one more
in the lap of the Guru

stains

dead bodies
disposed off
never to open the mouth
the lid is shut too tight
oh my dear
do not be worried
clouds shall fall to earth
surely bring the rain
a measure of bucket
shall suffice
to remove the stain

my nandigram

they ran a big enterprise
a multinational syndicate
that brought them neither riches
nor wealth
but a lot of pleasure and elation
great fulfilment
those merchants
roaming about without let
during the night
and making a kill
in broad day-light
wanted my land
to stamp on it
their existence
proclaim independence from me
did not ask to give away
my land
nor threw some notes in my face
as due compensation
simply asked me to disappear
they knew
that i was bound to oblige
that i hugged close
what most call life

autumn

the clouds came
came from the heavens
and came to water you
the sun rose
from behind the Harmukh
the moon ascended over Chrar-i-Sharieff
to dazzle you
a breeze blew from the Shankaracharya hill
and made you fragrant
fairies from the zabarvan
sang lullabies for you
'paertho gilas kulinay tal'
the chinars from boni bagh too sang
moj Kashir exalted
your birth...
however, the satanic spirits
envied and conspired
blew apart all innocent leaves
since then
the clouds have not rained
the sun did not shine
the moon with her frozen eyes
has turned death-pale
the chinar has dried up

heavens, the Harmukh and the Shankaracharya hill

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mourn and wail

oh little flower

in taking you away

the death does not feel proud

the dried flower valleys whisper that

to barren mountain peaks

snow has melted

but the flower virkumb refuses to sprout

the tenke batni has not flourished

the cattle have gone to the heights

but the shepherd has not played the flute

since you left

life in God's home has been silenced

(dedicated to shujat bukhari)

surrender

her eyes
cordoned off
my heart
the crackdown
zeroed in on heartbeats
the informer
eyes, my own
identified my desire
despite being the commander of my heart
a big grin on her face succeeded
in smashing the fortified walls
of my fragile heart..
i have been made to surrender
hands are tied
in the court of love
i have been sentenced
to lifelong partnership

my village

rays kissing
paddy ears
yawing tree branches inviting
singing birds
dancing rivulets playing santoor
shepherds moving uphill
school bells ringing
skies resonating with prayers
a gunfire
the village is dead

routine

they come
after he leaves
he returns
after they leave
i stay
day and night
a grain in a grinder

pain

nights are curfewed
scare has engulfed the village
windows shut
barking dogs add to terror
ailing mother screams
under the quilt
children are dumped
in a cellar
wind at the door petrifies
father loses hope
mother identifies the knock
a neighbor needs some medicine

my post office

my village has a post office
it opens ten to five
the postman receives the dak
distributes some
returns a few letters
but a bundle is dumped in a corner
waiting
for the recipients to return
burnt houses do not acknowledge
the dak

deceit

all day

we keep planning

discuss strategies

to safeguard the neighbourhood

support each other

be prepared to help

in case...

the night changes the scenario

dogs start barking

neighbour refuses

to open the door

on the banks of vitasta

i ride a legacy
my father
grandfather
great-grandfather
bestowed me...
mouth shut
i watch
my neighbour
he rides a mercedes
to my neighbourhood
he is a newcomer
know by his palatial house
now

terror

gone are the days
when the rising sun would shower
mystic rays
when a broken heart's cries
even the unknown folks would hear
when among a neighbourhood
delight and pain would be shared
in the land of Lalla
tragedies today inflict scars deep
and one can't even freely weep
people, regularly killed in broad-day light
the dead are mourned, yes
but through the secretive night

the butterfly

it was God's wonder
like a butterfly
i would flutter
in the garden that is Kashmir
and suck the nectar
from tender fragrant leaves
even during the white of winter
it was my lucky charm
when a thorn would stretch its arm
to make my landing soft
and would not allow me to flip
even when i had a slip
it was a warm feeling
the atmosphere had a touch of healing
the rainbow of culture provided the light
when in darkness
my apprehensions would take a flight
with tender wings i would fly
like a butterfly in the open sky
suddenly alas...
the garden lost God's grace
stormy winds it had to face
the wind was jealous of my flight

with tender wings i had gained height
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during the night it plotted a raid

all the colours were made to fade...
that was the time when i would fly fast
in the garden that was so vast
today my wings are not so wide
yet i have nowhere to hide
for me the saying stays
a butterfly lives a full life
but that lasts for a few days

migratory birds

bird watchers
in the vale
rejoice
migratory birds
from far off places
have flocked to hokarsar
well in time
defying borders
nature is bountiful
with specified freedom
for those migratory birds
that fly to favourite sanctuaries
flocking with near and dear ones
of their sweet will
leaving behind not homes
nor hearths
flying over Peer Panchal
they dance and croon
chants of praise
for Kashyap Rishi's blessed abode
hovering over the vale
they pray
at the Shankaracharya hill

and pay their gratitude

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to the natives of the land

that makes them so proud
of the garden of Eden
flying from far off habitations
these birds
halt not for a second
near the hot horrid lands
the sweet marshy waters
and the comfy locales
of shady tree branches
attract them to fly non-stop
it is here
in the garden's backyard
that they meet
and celebrate
conquer skies
enjoy the season
and fly back anew
with fresh hopes
for homely destinations
with hopes to fly back again
to the paradise
with no fear from the net
oh, unlike me
and my family

the brook in my courtyard

the brook
in my courtyard
brings crystal clear waters
from glaciers
melting miles away
glaciers and brooks, both
named and preserved in folklore
along with my ancestors
who worshipped water
till today, i depend on
the flow of water
some i drink
some i use for those daily chores
a little i use for worshipping
the divine, early mornings
my worship sanctifies the water
water purifies my body
and i put all the impurities
into the water
what do you say?

mourning

i mourn
the dazzling showrooms at lal chowk
when i see a landless labourer
from a tiny village
of rural Kashmir
pulling a cycle rickshaw
in a metropolitan city of India
i mourn the brown barren earth of my village
when i see fountains
laid in gardens
hailing emperors
who still rule our psyche
even years after their termination
i mourn my fate
when political pundits tell me
that i live in a democracy
with a constitution
that guarantees my rights
and i mourn my ancestors
when i see son after son
ascend the throne
and sermonising me on
justice, law and rights

i mourn saints and sages
who taught me austerity
when i see the lavish life-style of a few
of my neighbours
who, till yesterday, were seen
at the gates
of my ancestral house
early mornings...
those gates today are in ruins
and yet i do not mourn

road accident

chilled looks
in hot summer
have dived into eyes
that look away
when I look into them
the chords of humanity have that freeze
even as valves of the loving heart expand
my aloneness gets a bath of blood
the azure sky outside my white painted window
turning red
an ambulance blowing a siren
speeds far away
a street dog barks
i close the window
it is coal pit dark
in and outside

caricature

broken fate lines
on my outspread palm
do not end all of a sudden
line after line
a curve
curve after curve
a twist
the curves and twists
that end suddenly
perhaps a caricature
like an image
emerges
the first sketch
of an unfinished painting
resembling a human frame
some painful impressions
impressions of the bygone
outlines of a few smiles
and on a sudden twist
immersing into a few tears
the curved fate line
emerges yet again

twisting palm

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as running across the curved finger webs

the star on the other side

twinkles

surprising

yet a fateful twist

to a simple tale

aaqa

(the master)

i execute
orders, you give
to execute
your 'road blocks'
trained over a period
experienced i stand today
need no orders now
to execute you, master
the moment, i think
you are blocking a road
mine

jantar mantar

wide open roads
red light at intersection
slogan-shouting farmers
from far off destinations
protests, marches, rallies and a procession
religious fervour
political assertions
some withdrawing
like a politician's corruption charge
some moving recklessly to further barge
a snake and ladder game
between police and public
some water cannons
and a lathi charge
road blockade
patient's trauma
railway traveler's headache
leader's triumph
worker's delight
something like a doordarshan soap...

security

security personnel
marching towards me
in bullet proof
armoured vehicles
do i call them
security forces?
they scare me

dream house

dreams
fulfilled?
maybe, maybe not
with that risk, they always are fraught
yet they make life smile
momentarily, for a while
like the walnut trees
that worked as pollution fence
back home, that existed once
like apricot and cherry
that made children merry
also, the apple trees
that played the host
to birds chirping most
the gushing streams
that reflect sunrays
putting me to nap
for a while, did smile
thought it to be real
but alas
as i woke
the dream also broke
like the picture frame
of that house in my hands
my hands not bleeding
it is again my heart

the cactus

huge shady trees are grown
over vast stretches of land
in small villages
deep woods
that provide food
and fodder too
are protected
preserved
though they belong to none
fruit trees are unattended
they belong to the entire village
with small dwellings
big cities
cater to large populations
shrinking spaces
grow money plants
in emptied whisky containers
cactus trees decked in vases
decorating balconies and corridors
in metropolitan cities
the world over, life reflects that

yellow card

we were humans
in a bygone age
enjoying
sumptuous spicy salty
peppery foods
no diabetes,arthritis
fatty livers and joint pain
now we consume jazzy
spirited, purified chemicals
we enjoyed visiting
blood relations
friends
excursions to hills
family get-togethers on occasions
sour and sweet
but now, we do not find time even
for next of kin
instead spend time
in conference halls
away from lives dear
and not to see
for days and months
even venerable parents
once we had mothers

were born Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu
now, we are produced
courtesy doctors, surrogates
in hospitals, born
we in hospitals breathe our last
remain in mortuaries
waiting for the children
to light the pyre ...
with grand children
the old would play, then
now, the grand children play
with our emotions
we raised houses then
now we wreck houses
to live in old age homes
everything ancestral has vanished
into strange pastures
we have acquired yellow cards
our precious possession
precious, more than emotions
emotions, a thing of the past
rustic, now
yellow cards are roads to riches
yellow, ought not to lapse
parents may
yellow ensures
good life
'it may not be permanent
the parents are neither'

mahabharat

mahabharat is my history
Krishna
you are my Lord
each morning i pray to you
surrender at your lotus feet
not remembering that
my ancestors did not participate
in the war
Krishna, you killed my king damodara
Balram, your brother
killed my king's father gonanda
happy i am still
for you established yasovati
at the throne
happy i am
that you established dharma
and promised to incarnate
to establish dharma
and make truth triumph
for thirty years i am entangled
in my own mahabharata
losing every bit of my existence
i pray to you
do not incarnate now

i have seen lot of bloodshed

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i pray to Lord Shiva

the Nilkantha

to descend from kailash

drink all the Halahala

and free my world

from all hate

i pray to Him

as life is love

for Him

and me...

bless us

o Shiva

brij nath betab's collection of poems 'harud' is a nostalgic record of the years of turbulence in kashmir followed by the migration of a large chunk of native population to other parts of the country. however, it is a record wholly personal in nature sensitive and touching to the core. it reflects the entire gamut of his response to the phenomena around. it starts with pride in his heritage ('blank page') where he recalls Abhinavgupta and Lalleshwari as his cultural predecessors. then he records how autumn has overtaken spring ('harud'), how perceptions about him and even his own self-perception have changed over the years ('metamorphosis'), how silence is his only celebration now ('celebration'), doubts about his own existence ('existence'), etc. these are followed by poems which record violence ('hundred and ten', 'migration', 'just suddenly', 'wandhama', 'chittisinghpura') both mental and physical. in between there are nostalgic memories of many cultural vignettes and practices ('the brook in my courtyard', 'ladishah'). these have been a part of his existence and he recalls these with fond memories. but there are also poems which talk of ordinary, mundane affairs and experiences. for instance, in 'facebook', he talks about how the facebook communication has robbed the ordinary human communication of its genuineness and warmth.

betab has used a stylistic typographical device in which he uses english alphabet only in its lower case version. this gives a certain spontaneity, a personal touch to what he has been trying to communicate to the reader. a combination of content and form in this way definitely adds to the charm of the poems. it is a new style of poetic narration and, i am sure, many younger poets will follow it in their work.

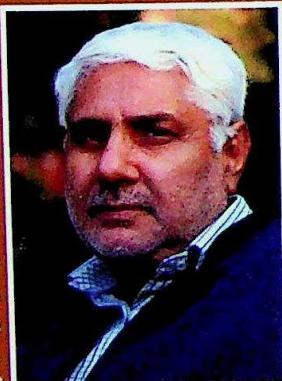
the tone of the poems is sombre and reflective which could not have been otherwise given the overarching theme of migration that he has tackled. he has done it with such feather-touch sensitivity that it strikes a chord with the readers of poetry instantly. combined with the stylistic device of using the lower case letters in english, 'harud' is a new experiment which is bound to be noticed in literary circles in kashmir.

sri aurobindo noted that "the great poet interprets to man his present or reinterprets for him his past but can also point him to his future and in all three reveal to him the face of the eternal. reading harud, one gets the impression that in one sweep, the poet interprets the present, reinterprets the past and points to the future harud is an eclectic combination of historical consciousness and a unique sensitivity towards contemporaneous socio-political milieu. harud is not a classiest piece of literature meant for the literary few, but it echoes aspirations of each of us and reverberates the existential, social, historical, religious and spiritual issues that confront us all. it is true that betab has been minimalist in terms of evoking literary devices of similes, metaphors, irony and others, but that doesn't deprive the book of its literary candour. instead, the book classically represents the fact that how one can weave beautiful thoughts using simple words and piercing expressions without indulging in sophisticated literary techniques - this i say only to overate betab's simplicity and not to underrate those works of art that thrive on literary sophistication. besides awakening our aesthetic sense, i hope that the book will stimulate in us the faculty of critical cognition and will challenge us to reconsider and reevaluate our age old cherished notions, our much narrower constructs and our understanding of things and events - past and present. if not all, i am sure harud will succeed to do either of these things and what else shall a piece of poetry do. i hope that the book will be well received by readers and critics alike and will generate a healthy debate and cast a sustainable influence on our existing literary horizons.

amir suhail wani
author and comparative studies scholar



born on 20th november 1953 at bonpora akingam in kashmir, brij nath betab is an internally displaced person, wandering from one city to another, after retirement from prasar bharati broadcasting corporation of india. he worked as news reader, news editor and correspondent with all india radio and door darshan. he also worked as a senior fellow ministry of culture, government of india. earlier he has published three books, one in his mother tongue kashmiri and the other two in hindi and urdu. he served on literary committees at bhartiya jnanpith, national book trust, sahitya akademi and j&k academy of art, culture and languages. with masters in political thought, he regularly writes for news papers and periodicals. he has so far bagged three national/state awards.



brij nath pandit betab



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